

# CHARACTER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES



## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES AND THE CHARACTER EDUCATION FORUM**

**The model for these activities is adapted from  
*Creative Conflict*, by D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson  
(Interaction Book Company, Minneapolis, Minn., 1987).**

These activities can be used to discuss character standards and dilemmas that apply to the career area of your Explorer post or Learning for Life group. You can conduct them as single activities during one post or group meeting or you can use several meetings to explore the character issues in depth.

## INTRODUCTION

Character judgments are a part of every profession, vocation, hobby, and recreational activity, as well as every relationship. The Character Education Forum and the character education activities are program resources that assist you in encouraging thought and discussion about character questions relevant to relationships, careers, or interest areas, for example:

- Is it right to accept a gift from a supplier who is bidding for an account when you are responsible for choosing the supplier?
- Should it be legal for a police officer to accept a second job?
- What do you do when your boss does something illegal?
- Is it right to refuse jury duty?
- When is censorship okay?

The Character Education Forum and character education activities help participants discuss these and other issues in an interesting, organized, and active way. The forum and activities can easily be adapted to your particular interests.

### The Character Education Forum

A Character Education Forum is simply a post or group meeting devoted to learning about the character issues in your career interest area. You might invite one or more individuals with expertise in the area to speak to your post or group. They can describe the ethical standards for their profession that are upheld by corporations, trade associations, unions, or other organizations. It is best if they give examples of how those standards are used, explain the consequences of breaking the rules, and explain why the rules are important. The presenters can also give examples of the character dilemmas that arise in their professions. These could be dilemmas for which character standards have not been written or for which it is difficult to understand how to apply standards.

### Character Education Activities

Character education activities are dilemmas without easy answers, dilemmas in which each side might have valid arguments. The following situation is an example.

You have been summoned for jury duty in your county. One of the cases on the docket is the well-

publicized prosecution of a man for a series of assaults that occurred within a five-mile radius of your house. These were especially brutal crimes that occurred over several months. The assailant entered the open windows of the homes of the victims and assaulted and robbed them.

Because you live in the area where the robberies occurred and where the defendant lives, you are concerned about your safety during and after the trial. Your choices are as follows:

- To avoid any possibility of revenge or intimidation, you ask to be excused from participation on the jury, or
- You serve on the jury anyway because you believe it is your civic and moral obligation to serve and that attempting to avoid jury duty would be shirking your responsibility.

## INSTRUCTIONS

To use these opposing positions as learning activities for your participants, follow these instructions.

### Organize the Activity

Divide participants into groups of four. Include adults present. If possible, divide the participants so that they work with people they don't know very well.

Divide each group of four into two groups of two. Give each pair a copy of a position statement. Make sure that each pair's position opposes the position of the other pair in the foursome. It does not matter whether the participants agree with their assigned position.

### Conduct the Activity

A character education activity has five simple steps. Describe and conduct them one at a time. Allow enough time to complete each step before moving on. All groups of four should work on each step at the same time. The entire activity takes from forty-five minutes to two hours.

- 1. Learn the position.** With your partner, develop as many arguments as possible to support your assigned position. You can also work with a pair with the same topic and position from another group.
- 2. Present your position.** Outline your arguments to the other pair. In turn, listen closely to their position,

making sure you understand their arguments. Restate what others say to clarify your understanding.

- 3. Discuss the issue.** Defend your position and critique the opposing position, trying to persuade the opposing pair that you are correct. Then listen to their defense and critique. Remember to be critical of ideas, not people.
- 4. Reverse positions.** Switch positions with the other pair. Take a few minutes with your partner to review your new position. Present and defend your new position as if you really believed in it.
- 5. Try to reach consensus.** Work toward finding a position that all four believe is the correct one. This may be a position already discussed or a completely new one. Change your mind only when you are convinced by rational argument.

### **Follow Up**

After the activity is over, discuss it as a large group. Ask each group of four how they arrived at their final position. Compare the positions chosen and the arguments used to support them. Reflect on the process, discussing both the activity and how group members related with each other.

## **PREPARED CHARACTER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES**

The following character education activities may be used to practice the process until you are comfortable with it.

## **APPLYING THE CHARACTER EDUCATION ACTIVITY PROCESS TO YOUR OWN CAREER INTEREST AREA**

When you are comfortable with the character education activity process, you can use it with character dilemmas chosen by you, selected by participants, or suggested during a Character Education Forum. The process is exactly the same, except that you will need to either write or explain the dilemma for the groups.

As explained previously, you can do this in one meeting or several. For example, positions could be assigned at one meeting and the actual character education activity conducted one or two weeks later. During that time, the partners could be gathering information from libraries or professionals in the field to support their position. They could use this information to prepare an argument they believe would be convincing.

## **USE WITH YOUR GROUP OR POST DILEMMAS**

Every group has problems or dilemmas that are difficult to solve. The character education activity process can be used to help them discuss solutions. Just as you have done before, assign positions to opposing team members, regardless of whether they agree with the position, and ask them to develop supporting arguments. Follow the steps to help them come to a consensus.